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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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TO DEPT PASS:

Department of State
Managua, San Jose, San Salvador, Tegucigalpa

E.O. 11652:
TAGS:

XGDS-2
PINS, SHUM, PORS, GT, ASFO

FROM:

American Embassy GUATEMALA DATE: March 16, 1978

SUBJECT:

Monthly Report on Political Violence and
Human Rights: January 1978

REF

SUMMARY: Sixteen politically tinged incidents of violence resulting in 18 deaths made January 1978 statistically consistent with the last few months of 1977. In a month where the safe return of a kidnapped ex-foreign Minister and the transfer to Costa Rica of a wounded terrorist dominated the local scene, seven tortured corpses were found abandoned in various Departments; the leftist EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) sustained losses in four separate confrontations with police and/or military; a labor leader was kidnapped, tortured and killed in the capital; two incidents of violence directed at MLN figures marred an otherwise peaceful month of active campaigning for the March 5 elections; arsonists caused at least \$40,000 worth of damage in sugar plantation fires on the South Coast; and the human rights issue surfaced during Assistant Secretary of State Tedman's talks with GOG officials here. END SUMMARY

Identification of Violence as "Political" -- Pinpointing "political violence" in Guatemala continues to be complicated by at least two factors: (1) existence of non-political violence often difficult to differentiate from the political variety, and (2) a propensity on the part of the press and public alike to premise certain incidents as politically motivated when in fact they are not. For example, during January police discovered in the Department of Sacatepequez the body of a 17-year-old farmer who had been brutally tortured and then crucified. Investigators say the motive was personal vendetta. Yet, when disappearance, torture and murder occur and the cases go unsolved, the crimes are popularly believed to bear the earmarks of a right-left, government-terrorist feud. In short, political

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

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violence is often not too different in nature from personal violence and, therefore, hard to identify.

To illustrate further, three peasants were reported kidnapped in Escuintla. Four days later it was discovered the three were in the local jail accused of various crimes. Also, early in the month a Chilean soccer player who had been reported kidnapped a few days before was discovered in Panama, where the GOG had deported him. As is evident from these examples, rumors and hasty conclusions abound, and many of them (we suspect) prematurely become political violence statistics.

EGP vs. Law Enforcement - The EGP and law enforcement officers clashed several times during January. The most spectacular incident, at San Bernardino, Suchitepéquez, left two policemen and three guerrillas dead (among them school teacher Clemenencia Paiz Carcamo, former PGT and FAR member and probable EGP leader). One of the EGP survivors of the encounter, Mario Alberto Dominguez Morales, was later captured, supposedly rescued by his comrades, eventually granted political asylum by Costa Rica, and given safe passage there by the GOG. Shortly thereafter, ex-foreign Minister Dr. Roberto Herrera Ibarquén, kidnapped December 31 by the EGP, was released unharmed as promised. A "deal" between the government and EGP was hinted at by the press.

[REDACTED] Mobile Military Police (PMA's) raided a supposed EGP hide-out in downtown Mazatenango. During the shoot-out, a student was killed and another wounded, both apparently uninvolved bystanders. The press reported three guerrillas taken captive but there has been no further word. Both raids are believed to have been triggered in the search for Herrera. Guatemala 25, 72, 373, 518, 538 and 602.

At 11:00 a.m. on 11 March, a patrol sent to check on an EGP hide-out, clashed with guerrillas. As a result of the clash, the officer in charge, Second Lt. Sergio Portillo, was killed.

[REDACTED] Minister, Izabal, a suspected EGP member, [REDACTED] with Alejandro, picked up for shooting someone,

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tried to commit suicide in jail and was hospitalized. A companion, one of three who tried to free Marroquin en route to jail, was shot and killed by police.

In an incident not included in the statistics for the month, an unofficial source reported, and two newspapers duly repeated, that three EGP members were killed in a clash with security forces at Ixcán in El Quiché. The specifics are unclear, the report is unsubstantiated, and there is the likelihood that it may be the previously mentioned shoot-out instead of a separate encounter.

Torture and Death -- A definite attention-getter was the kidnap, vicious torture and murder of labor leader and PGT/FAR activist Victor Manuel Paniagua Gonzalez in the capital (Guatemala 373). His armed assailants remain unidentified and unapprehended. Labor leaders at the time claimed the incident signalled the beginning of repression in retaliation for the Herrera kidnapping (at the time unresolved), but no identifiably similar incidents have ensued.

The political affiliation of seven other tortured and discarded bodies are unknown, however. Three of the corpses, one identified as Francisco Gerardo Diaz Galicia (alias "Maquinita") and the other two unidentified, were found in the same spot in Quezaltenango within a week. The others were an unidentified middle-aged man found in Zone 12 in Guatemala City; Benedicto Ramirez Leiva discovered in Chiquimula; and two unidentified men apparently dumped from the same car along a road in Retalhuleu. In addition, the body of Eduardo Lorenzo was found without signs of torture, but with 15 bullet holes, in Izabal. In Jalapa unknown assailants killed Beltrán Mazariegos Osorio, a Comisionado Militar (an unpaid military volunteer who traditionally serves in rural areas as a recruiter and enforcer), whose corpse showed evidence of violence as well as stab and bullet wounds.

Other Violence -- MLN Presidential candidate Col. Enrique Peralta Azurdia's house was peppered by gunfire in Guatemala City (Guatemala 518), and the candidate also received telephone threats against his life. In a parallel incident, four young men sprayed the offices of Peralta Azurdia's supporter and prominent political figure Gabriel Giron Ortiz with machinegun fire shortly after he had received a

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telephone threat against his life. And in the capital, armed assailants kidnapped Lorenzo Aguilar Ramos from his home for reasons unknown and have yet to be heard from.

On South Coast sugar plantations, arsonists set at least five blazes, including one on the Finca Santo Tomás, jointly owned by Departmental Gov. Col. Alvaro Martínez López and Col. Miguel Angel Ponciano. Total losses in all the fires exceeded \$40,000.

Local inhabitants of Ixtahuacán Chiquito, Huehuetenango, have complained to the Minister of Defense of a curfew and travel ban imposed since mid-January by army authorities in their area. The curfew runs from 6 PM to 6 AM and movement is limited to a two kilometer radius. Only emergency visits are allowed and violators may be shot, according to the complaint. It accused the army of firing indiscriminately and of wounding the son of a campesino on January 27. Reportedly, he was seriously injured and was evacuated by military helicopter; he has not been heard from since. The army has been conducting anti-EGP sweeps in northern Huehuetenango and El Quiché. (USDAO Guatemala message IR 01/1752 Mar 78, IR 6 838 0042 81)

Villagers of Villa de Esquipulas in Chiquimula denounced comisionados militares, David, Eliseo, Juan and Virgilio Pacheco, for terrorizing the town. They charged that these comisionados have brought as many as 100 men armed with pistols and rifles into town threatening local inhabitants and causing merchants to close their businesses. The complaint in the form of a petition to President Laugerud and to the Minister of Defense noted that these men have likewise terrorized the nearby towns of San José Las Lagrimas, Chaguala, Horcones, Cerro Redondo, Las Palmas, Piedra de Amolar, Ulopa and others.

Human Rights Highlights -- During the visit of Assistant Secretary of State Terence Todman, human rights came up in his discussions with Defense Minister Gen. Spiegeler, who pointed to the difficult task of simultaneously protecting human rights and containing terrorism and subversion in Guatemala 1977. The subject also arose in talks with President Gen. Kjell Laugerud, who defended his human rights record and seemed not to balk at the prospect

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of a second human rights report (Guatemala 488 and 489). Negative reaction to Todman's human rights pressure appeared in La Nacion editorial, "Terence's Big Stick Wrapped in Smiles" (Guatemala 554).

A private advance copy of the Department of State human rights report on Guatemala was delivered January 30 to Ambassador Edgar Sarceño Morgan, director of the Diplomatic Service of the Foreign Ministry. The silence that greeted delivery of the document has continued to the present.

Also pertinent to human rights was another assurance at a press conference by President Laugerud that he would "turn over the Presidency to the candidate elected by the people" in the March 5 elections. The campaigning for President and Mayor of Guatemala City was active during January, but there was no significant campaign-related violence.

The Association of University Students informed the press in mid-January that Amnesty International was contemplating a branch office in Guatemala. No further information has come to light on this possibility.

Statistics -- Of the 18 deaths, two were in Izabal, two in Guatemala City, two in the Oriente, two in the Pacific lowlands, and ten in the Highlands.

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